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## THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAIN

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In 1832 the franchise which had previously belonged to women was taken from them, and its loss seems to have aroused scarcely a murmur of protest. Now, after the lapse of less than one hundred years, the demand of women for the vote has grown so insistent that their enfranchisement cannot much longer be delayed. And this demand is not confined to a small group of intellectuals, as in the early days of the agitation, but is coming from the hearts of women of all classes—the mill girl, the university woman, the member of the nobility.

This alteration in the attitude toward the franchise is of profound significance as an indication of the great change which has been going on, quietly and almost unnoticed, in the economic and social life of woman. The suffrage movement is a milestone marking another step in her evolution. "To give votes to women would be a revolution," one is told again and again in Great Britain. But the revolution is already accomplished. The giving of the ballot would be but the public recognition of the change which social forces have brought about.

Industrial development has created a situation in which there are five million women in the labor market. In Lancashire sixty-two per cent. go out to work. In Manchester and Birmingham sixty-three per cent. In Stockport and Dundee even a larger number. It is too late now to say to these communities: "Women should not vote, their place is the home." It might have been listened to in the days before the industrial revolution, when woman's work was done in her home. But now she has been forced to play her part in the world in competition with men. It was inevitable that she should protest against being handicapped in this struggle by the denial of the protection of the ballot.

Educational opportunities for women have been won at last, though there is still much to be obtained. To-day one listens with

wonder as the elder women tell of the bitter opposition which greeted their entrance into the educational world. At Oxford and Cambridge we see a relic of the old barriers in the refusal of the universities to grant their degrees to women who have completed the work and who may have passed the examinations with higher honors than have any of the men. Again, in the technical instruction which is being introduced to-day one sees the same old sex discrimination, almost all of the opportunities for technical training being given to boys.

In the professional world she has forced her way, though here, too, there are still some gates that are barred. All the higher positions under the government are closed to her, and she is excluded from the legal profession, for example. One begins to realize, however, how much has been achieved when one listens to a woman doctor telling of her early days—of the ridicule and even personal violence which the pioneers had to face. And it is even a greater step to the time when Dr. Johnson denounced portrait painting and literature as unsuitable pursuits for “delicate females”—and the world apparently agreed.

The British woman takes much greater part in political life than does the woman in our own country. For a long time she has been in evidence at every election, canvassing and speaking for the various men's parties. From instructing the electors how to vote to demanding the ballot for herself was but a natural step. The first Primrose dame was the mother of the Suffragettes. And yet it is not so long ago that the political field, too, was closed. One who is still active in public life has told us that in her youth it was only by being concealed behind curtains that she could attend a political meeting—so improper was the appearance of a woman at such an affair considered.

In social activities, again one sees the revolution in her status. To-day, when her active help is sought whenever a scheme for social reform is undertaken, it is difficult to realize that as recently as 1840, at an anti-slavery conference in London, the women delegates were refused admittance by the men.

The laws have not kept pace with this changed position of women, though the old divine right of husbands has been somewhat modified. In 1882 the married woman's property act gave

her some measure of legal freedom. But even to-day the married woman has no claim whatever upon her husband for maintenance, except that he may not allow her to reach a state of such starvation as to make her chargeable to the parish. Even though he be a millionaire his wife can legally claim from him nothing beyond this minimum necessary to preserve life. The wife, it should be noticed, is liable for the support of her husband.

The divorce laws are notoriously unfair. While a man can secure divorce on the ground of his wife's adultery, she must prove in addition to adultery, cruelty or bigamy, or two years' desertion. The legacy laws also discriminate against her. One of the most grievous hardships is in the law which gives the entire control of the children to the father, when the parents live together, and allows him to dispose of them without regard to the wishes of the mother.

A man's right of control over the person of his wife has been greatly decreased. In the famous Jackson case it was decided that a husband may not imprison his wife. She is bound, however, to go with him anywhere at his desire. Recently a man in the Hampstead Infirmary, London, had the power, according to the law, to compel his wife to remain in the workhouse attached to the institution, though by living with her family she was able to earn her living, and was anxious to do so. In one case the vice-chancellor held that it was the duty of the wife to submit to her husband in event of a difference of opinion and that the husband was "king and ruler in his own family."

In the world of ideas there has been even less reflection of the changed status of woman, and it is in this realm that the great battle, it seems to me, is being fought to-day. Current opinion at the end of the eighteenth century seems to have regarded a man as a personality—precious as a personality—but a woman as merely an appendage to man, and precious only because of her connection with him. "The chief end of man," says the Scottish catechism is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." But the chief end of woman seems to have been held, as Mrs. Fawcett put it, "To glorify man and to help him enjoy himself for a little time." This old idea of women as created solely in order to minister to man is akin to the idea that the working man's whole purpose in the world is to

contribute to the happiness of the upper classes. Both ideas have been hard to kill. Both still survive in this country, we know, but apparently are much more widely held in Great Britain. In the homes of the five million women wage-earners the "half angel, half idiot" conception of woman, has died a natural death. In the multitude of homes where she is the chief bread winner the old ideal, which presented weakness and dependence as her highest virtues, could not survive. These ideas, born of a different environment than the present, are still, however, widely spread through the land.

An account of the many restrictions surrounding women at the end of the eighteenth century makes strange reading in the present. But in reading of the ideals established for them then, there is no unfamiliar note. In England to-day those words of Rousseau might have been written: "To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console, to render our lives easy, and agreeable; these are the duties of women at all times and what they should be taught in their infancy." Mr. John Burns, a member of the present Cabinet, preached exactly this ideal to a class of graduating girls last year. The feeling that woman is an inferior is evident even in the social world of London, where, as Miss Ethel Arnold told us the other day, the first principle is that the men must be entertained whatever else happens. It is revealed in the cry of the gamin: "Votes for women, votes for dogs!" Constantly one sees this attitude in the press where a meeting is reported as of no importance, as "there were only women present." The opposition to the suffrage is eloquent of this view of women. One finds it is not argument one is combating, but a deep-rooted prejudice, which feels that all is well when woman bows in reverence to man, and says with Milton's Eve:

"God is thy law, thou mine; to know no more  
Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise."

It is cause for rejoicing, conditions being as they are, that the suffrage has not been won without a hard struggle in Great Britain, for the struggle has done much to help women throw off their mental bondage. It has kindled in their hearts a great spirit

of rebellion against their subjection. It has developed a self-respect, a respect for their sex, unknown before. On all hands one hears it said: "A new race of women is developing before our eyes"—a type which has discarded the old ideal of physical, and mental, and moral dependence, and has substituted the ideal of strength.